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THE MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN

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Samuel Owens Wedding Picture - 1890.

SAMUEL GASIWAY OWENS

There are many people around Madera who still recall Samuel Owens in his early days in Madera County.

Many incidents are cited of his kindness, friendliness, ability to work well with others, his great insight into situations of difficulty, his strength of character, belief in justice, fairness in dealing with others; a man who stood tall among his family and associates.

The following story of the life of Samuel G. Owens was written from notes given by his son, John Owens of Madera, California, and from an oral conference with John Owens, plus statements from several who knew him.

Samuel Gasiway Owens was born on February 25, 1863 in Upper Marborough, Maryland. His parents were Sarah E. Dove and John Owens.

There were two boys born to this marriage, one dying in early childhood and Samuel.

When Samuel was about one year old, the family moved to Baltimore. Samuel went to school here until he was ten years old, when he went to Virginia to live with his uncle who owned a tobacco plantation. Samuel had no opportunity to attend school again. (The reader should note this before reading further, that he may better appreciate Samuel Owens and what he accomplished.)

In 1882 when Samuel was nineteen years old he returned to his home in Maryland and with his mother started for Fort Worth, Texas, by train.

From here on Sam Owen's story reads like the old Horatio Alger books. From this point you begin to wonder in what way Madera County could possibly enter the picture. Let's get back to our story.

While on the train to Fort Worth, Samuel's mother became ill, making it necessary to get off the train at Weatherford, Texas, so that Mrs. Owens might have medical attention.

They talked to a man at the station about a place to stay until they could get to a doctor. The man said the only hotel in town

was over a saloon and he felt it was not a suitable place for Mrs. Owens to stay. He kindly invited them into his spring wagon and offered them the hospitality of his home until Mrs. Owens was able to travel.

Instead of going on to Fort Worth, they remained with their new friends, Samuel working on the ranch and Mrs. Owens helping with the cooking and housework. There was a small house near the main ranch house and they lived here until Mrs. Owens passed away on Jan. 12, 1885.

After the death of his mother, Samuel was alone, twenty-two years old, and eager to see more of the world.

In June 1885 he started for San Francisco to see a friend there.

While on the train, he met John M. Jones from Tennessee, who was on his way to Los Angeles. They started talking, Mr. Jones persuading Sam Owens to go to Los Angeles. (There are many in Madera who recall John M. Jones, Madera County's fourth Sheriff. If space permits we will print a brief biography of him in this issue.) Sam Owens induced Jones to continue on to San Francisco with him.

On the way to San Francisco Sam Owens decided to stop off in Madera to see a friend named Clayton, who had a ranch located where the Arakelian Ranch is in the Riperdan District today. They arrived in Madera on July 10, 1885, at 10 o'clock at night. They registered at Mace's Hotel. It was so hot they could not sleep so they got up and went across to the Southern Pacific Depot and slept on a baggage truck.

The next morning they had breakfast and began asking for directions on how to reach the Clayton Ranch.

They met E. H. Chapman in from his ranch. He offered to take them to the Clayton Ranch. Mr. Chapman asked them if they wanted to go to work for him.

Sam Owens and John Jones went to work on the Chapman Ranch which is today owned by A. G. Emerzian. J. Walter Schmitz, great grandfather of Jack Schmitz, Jr., bought it from E. H. Chapman. Three generations of the Schmitz family have lived there.

Sam and John's first job was to bury a mule that had just died at the ranch.

One memorable piece of work on the ranch was the planting of eighty acres of Johnson grass. Some of the farmers had heard about this "wonderful" grass and how well it would grow.

While working on the Chapman Ranch, Sam met Henry B. Skelton, great grandfather of John Owens of Madera. Henry Skelton's place was located across from what is today Madera County's Maintenance Yard. Mr. Skelton cared for the stage horses owned by Henry Washburn.

Henry B. Skelton was an early guide from Mariposa into Yosemite when there were no roads there. Later on he was a stage driver from Mariposa to Wawona.

On May 14, 1886, a branch line of the Southern Pacific Railroad was built from Berenda to Raymond. Passengers for Yosemite got off at Berenda and boarded the train for Raymond. Here they were met by horse drawn stages and went on into Yosemite Valley. (In the Historian for April 1965 more is told of this railroad and reasons for construction.)

In 1886 Sam Owens went to work for the Yosemite Stage and Turnpike Company as a hostler and a year later became a stage driver from Raymond to Wawona and on into the Valley.

Henry B. Skelton built and operated a hotel in Raymond called the Skelton Hotel. It is the same building that today is called the Osmunson Apartments, located just a short distance from the Raymond Elementary School on the left hand side of the street going north through Raymond. The building has been remodeled considerably from the days when it was a hotel.

The passengers would come across from the train to the hotel for meals.

The Madera County Historical Society has several articles from the Owens family related to the days when the hotel was run by the Skelton family.

Edwin B. Skelton, son of Henry B. Skelton moved with his family from Mariposa to Raymond. It was here that Sam Owens met his

and on July 1, the auto stages began. Most of the horses were sold in August 1915.

Thus ended a truly exciting and thrilling era in Yosemite history. It was not an easy task to handle four or six horse teams, stay on those rugged roads, see to the comfort of the passengers, and arrive safely at their destination.

There are many men associated with stage driving in Yosemite who should be mentioned, William Sell, Jr., certainly. His story is one the Historian hopes to publish soon. Others were Ed Gordon, Tom Gordon, John Owens, Walter Metz, Jerome Martin and Victor Medina. We know there were many more but were unable to get the names.

This is the story of Samuel G. Owens. We have said little about his family but they were all there and generally at Wawona during the tourist season. John, at an early age, herded the cows that furnished the milk for the Wawona Hotel.

In 1906 Sam Owens built a home just south of the Alpha School. The home is now occupied by Mrs. Paola (Palmina) Dellavalle, 11253 Road 25½.

After finishing the stage work in Yosemite, Sam and family settled on the home ranch. Sam was elected in 1918 from District #1 to the Madera County Board of Supervisors. He was re-elected in 1922, 1926, and 1930.

Samuel Owens passed away while in office on August 26, 1933, at the age of seventy.

Thus ended the life of one of Madera County's early citizens, one who led an extremely active and worthwhile life, who was never too busy to lend a helping hand, to speak a kind word, and one who took time to be a good husband and father.

Mrs. Owens passed away March 9, 1945.

The Madera County Historical Society is fortunate in acquiring several items of historical interest from the Owens family: The Owens family Bible that Sam brought all the way from Maryland, a family album, Sam's baby dresses, his leather lunch box that he used so often, dental tools for horses, the brass hand bell that called the train passengers over to the Skelton Hotel for meals; a carving set, a wedding present of the Samuel Owens, dishes from the Skelton Hotel, and a large collection of photos of Yosemite Stages and drivers, also an interesting letter from Helen Miller Gould thanking Mr. Owens for his courtesy and thoughtfulness on her trip from El Portal to Yosemite in May, 1912.

If time and space permitted, we could cite many incidents related to the life of Samuel Owens but perhaps this story will help us to recall and to continue to remember him.

* * * *

JOHN MARION JONES

Inasmuch as John Jones came to Madera County with Samuel Owens and they were together in many kinds of work until Jones became Sheriff in 1903, we are adding a short biography of him.

John Marion Jones was born in 1865 near Gordonville, Tennessee. He had a good education for those days and probably would have gone further but he had a severe illness and was confined to his bed for sixteen months. He came to the Pacific Coast at the age of 20 and in a month had entirely recovered. He came to Madera in 1885, worked on the Chapman and then the Hely Ranch. In 1887 he became a teamster for the Madera Flume and Trading Company until 1892, then he worked for the Yosemite Stage and Turnpike Company, as a teamster hauling supplies, and later was in charge of teaming and supplies, with headquarters at Raymond. He was also in charge of oiling the road for a distance of twenty-eight miles.

In 1903 he became the Sheriff of Madera County and held this office until he was defeated in 1910 by S. W. Westfall. He was considered a very good Sheriff.

He married Miss Ida Tully who was a sister of Gene Tully whom many of us know. He resides in Fresno and is Curator of Fort Millerton Museum in Roeding Park.

John Jones and his wife moved to Chula Vista shortly after 1910 where they lived until their deaths a few years ago. They had one daughter, Marian Lee, who is at present a teacher in Chula Vista.

This is a very brief story, but we thought it would be well to include it in this issue of the Historian since he and Sam Owens came to Madera together.

future wife Francena Skelton, granddaughter of Henry B. Skelton.

Samuel Owens and Francena Skelton were married in Fresno on December 25, 1890, and spent their honeymoon in Centerville and Sanger. Five children were born to this couple: John, Marjorie, Elma, Lura and May. Of the five, John, Elma Owens Deck and May Owens are still living.

In 1893 Sam became foreman of the new stage ranch located just north of the old La Vina School. There were no fences, a small house and a windmill with an ordinary barrel for a water tank. Gradually this place was improved; cattle, alfalfa, a pumping plant (one of the first in the county) and three large barns, one for cows, one for painting and repairing the stages for the next tourist season and one for horse headquarters.

The cows for the Wawona Hotel were cared for here during the winter season when Yosemite Valley was closed.

The peak of the tourist season in Yosemite was April, May and June, stage passengers becoming less in late summer but the stages continued carrying mail until snow came to the Valley.

The reader should keep in mind the great amount of preparation necessary in order that everything would be ready when the tourist season opened in Yosemite. The milk cows were headed up there, taking about seven days, the horses were taken up also, some of course bringing the freshly painted stages.

About 1895, Sam Owens became assistant to Henry Washburn, owner and Superintendent of the Yosemite Stage and Turnpike Company and continued to be assistant until the death of Washburn when Sam became Superintendent.

Approximately six hundred horses were needed to carry on the work of both stage lines, the Yosemite Stage and Turnpike Company and the El Portal Stage into Yosemite. The El Portal Stage line was operated by Sam Owens from 1909 until 1914. The stage line from El Portal was closed in 1915 and was replaced by auto stage.

Perhaps at this point it would be interesting to talk about the Yosemite horse drawn stages.

Each stage carried either eight or eleven passengers; some were constructed just to carry mail and freight. They were painted red, trimmed in black with gold lettering on the sides, yellow undercarriage with fine black lines on the spokes of the wheels. These stages were a special style, constructed especially for use in Yosemite, open that the passengers might see Yosemite in all of its grandeur. The stages were manufactured in California.

It required two days to go from Raymond to Yosemite, about seventy miles, four horses usually. Stage stops were at Summit House, Grub Gulch, Ahwahnee, Miami, Wawona, 8 Mile, Grouse Creek, and some others. Stops depended on load, road conditions and speed of travel.

The horses were well cared for and beautifully matched.

The reader should bear in mind that there were many stages, one person interviewed recalled seeing as many as 18 stages lined up at either El Portal or Raymond stations ready to take passengers into the Valley.

John Owens has stated that his father would plan all the stage teams during the winter at the stage ranch. His memory of the many horses was so accurate that he could recall them all and was able to set up the teams in advance of the tourist season. He loved the horses and would never allow a driver to mistreat them.

The old toll bridge at Wawona must not be omitted from this story. The bridge and road were constructed under the supervision of Henry Washburn. A fee was charged to cross the bridge. This bridge has been restored and is a part of the Pioneer Village at Wawona. Several of the stages are housed there, that we may see and imagine the thrill and danger those early passengers felt as the stage came rolling along into the Valley.

The branch railroad from Berenda to Raymond discontinued passenger service in 1908, mail and freight was carried, and of course the granite, which went out to many cities of California to become some of the state's most beautiful buildings.

Sam Owens drove the last horse drawn stage out of Yosemite to Wawona on June 30, 1915,

TRAVELING IN BAJA CALIFORNIA IN 1865
The Diary of William T. Henderson
Annotated by Don C. Meadows

Among the papers of William T. Henderson in possession of the Madera County Historical Society is an holographic diary of two pages, headed Lower California, written by Mr. Henderson in 1865. No reason is given for his being in Baja, California, but from his past activities and the observations made on the peninsula it may be inferred that he was investigating mining activities. A brief biography of Henderson was published in the Madera County Historian in January 1964. The diary begins in San Quintin on December 11, and ends in San Diego on December 24, 1865. San Quintin is 203 miles south of San Diego by present day roads, but the distance traveled by Henderson was much greater. Henderson probably went to San Quintin on the schooner Fanny A. Hyde, which at that time was making regular trips south from San Diego. The diary is copied verbatim, including the eccentricities of spelling and punctuation. It is written as a single paragraph. Annotations are in parenthesis. The diary is interesting because it mentions residents who were living on the peninsula a hundred years ago.

The diary begins:

Left San Quintin Monday 11th Decm. 1865. Travelled 10 miles and camped in the open plain a short distance from the sea shore. (A dry camp about three miles south of the Santo Domingo river.)

Tuesday 12th. We travelled 8 miles and arrived at San Ramon owned by Jose Mario Espinsa and Son in law Rimaron. Went on 15 miles further and camped again in the open plain and on
(Camp was made on the San Telmo plateau near Point San Jacinto. Rancho San Ramon, of one square league, located on the north side of the Santo Domingo river, was granted to Jose Luciano Espinosa prior to 1846.)

Wdnes 13th we travelled 12 miles and arrived at Santa Elmos Rancho owned by the Brothers Grigora, Gabriel and Julian Arsi. here we sold a few pounds of flour and gave Senorita Rita Arsi a white handkerchief. Here commences the Granite Range. We then travelled on 12 miles further to San Rafael Ranch owned by Aniseto Duarte and his wife whom we found to be very hospitable.
(San Telmo rancho, consisting of several buildings and much good farm land, was granted to Ignacio Arce on January 12, 1834. It was formerly an assistancia of Mission Santo Domingo. From San Telmo Henderson traveled northward through rocky hills to the Rancho San Rafael on the Arroyo Seco, about five miles east of the present paved highway. Rancho San Rafael was granted to Anicito Duarte sometime prior to 1843.)

Thurs. 14th. Went 12 miles to the Rancho Salado & then 3 miles down the canyon west to the Salado Copper mine where we found Mr. Jenkins, former Supt. and Mr. Webb present Supt. here. It rained nearly all night.
(Rancho El Salado, one and one-half leagues in extant, was located near the present crossing of Highway 1 and Arroyo Salado. The copper mines were in the arroyo about five miles from the Pacific Ocean.)

Friday 15th. Went 25 miles to an old unoccupied house belonging to Francisco Meyers. Passed on our way the port of San Jecidro and house where lived a one eyed Frenchman.
(From the copper mines the journey was northwest to the San Ysidro Landing, then along the coast to the Meyers house near Rocky Point.)

Sat. 16th. Travelled 22 miles to the old mission of Santo Tomasa. Here lives the Governor at present Don Jose Mario Laroque. We then went 6 miles further to the Rancho La Gurlla (Grulla) owned by the viuda (widow) Sais (Sainz) whose daughter was married to Christobal McClure. (Marginal note: From the Salado mines to San Vincenta 15 miles from here to Santa Tomasa 24 miles.)
(Travel was north along the sea coast to the Santo Tomas river, then up the river to the old mission. Santo Tomas was the capital of the northern district of Baja, California, from 1849 to 1872. Rancho Soledad de la Grulla, "Retreat of the Crane," one and one-half square leagues in size, was granted to Domingo Sainz prior to 1846. It is located on the Arroyo La Grulla, twenty miles southeast of Ensenada.)

Sun. 17th. Travelled 35 miles to Pedro Castello on the Todos Santos Bay. Rained all night very heavy.
(The route traveled was more or less that followed by the paved highway between Santo Tomas and Ensenada. The house of Pedro Gastelum was located on the southwest corner of present day Avenida Gastelum and Third Street in the city of Ensenada. Henderson misunder-

Galen Clark who discovered the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees, standing by the tree. Picture was taken for the St. Louis Exposition (1904). S. G. Owens of Madera, Driver of Stage.

stood the name Gastelum and called it Castello. Pedro Gastelum was the son of Francisco Javier Gastelum who received possession of the ranch some time prior to 1846. The Rancho Ensenada was originally granted to Jose Manuel Ruiz on April 30, 1806.)

Monday 18th. Travelled 15 miles (went by the harbor of Sousal--Henderson note) to the San Antonio Copper mines and were hospitably entertained by Missus Martin and Emmins here we also found Ed. Reynolds. it rained all night. Next day
(Route traveled was that followed by the paved highway north from Ensenada six miles to Saucal. From Saucal, Henderson turned northeast and followed Arroyo Saucal to the Rancho San Antonio. San Antonio Rancho was confirmed to Maria Amparo Ruiz (de Burton) on December 10, 1834. The San Antonio copper mines were never of great importance.)

Tues. 19th. Travelled 9 miles to Santa Rosa copper mines where I found Mr. Campbell and others among whom was Mr. Johnson who lived above old mission about 6 miles who took us to his house that night. The next day was
(Travel was northwest over a range of hills into the wide valley of the Rio Guadalupe where the copper mines were located; then northward to the upper part of the San Miguel Valley and the Johnson house.)

Wdnes 20th went 15 miles passing the house of Mr. Coosswaite to the Descanso Ranch owned by Marchados. we then went 18 miles further where we arrived at Col. Wm. C. Ferrell's place called La Vino de Santa Teresa near the San Domingo Ranch owned by Dr. Gilbert where we lay by the next day Thur. 21.
(Travel was down the San Miguel Valley past the old Dominican mission of San Miguel then owned and occupied by Philip Crostwaite of San Diego; then to the seashore and northward along the coast to the Descanso valley and ranch owned by Manuel Machado, and onward to the north to Magano Arroyo. There Henderson turned eastward up the arroyo about six miles to the home of Ferrell. Wm. C. Ferrell was a successful lawyer and District Attorney of San Diego County. In 1859 a case that he was handling went against him, and in a fit of rage he left San Diego and became a resident of Baja, California. He lived as a recluse on a small bit of property on the southwest side of Mesa Redondo which was known locally as Reventadero, rough ground, but which he called the Vineyard of Saint Teresa. He died at Reventadero in 1883.)

Friday 22nd. Travelled 8 miles to the Rancho Qurra de Banado Assurte.
(Henderson's spelling of Spanish names was usually phonetic. The place named was properly Rancho Cuernos de Venado Suerte, or Settlement on the Deer Horns Ranch. The ranch was located north of Table Mountain about eight miles east of Rosarito Beach.)

Sat. 23rd. Travelled 10 miles to Rancho Tia Juana. Here lives one of the Baldino's (Bandini's). We then travelled 12 miles to the Punto Rancho, Mr. Wilcox and Don Pancho Arbuello and 9 miles to Capt. Gregory's house.
(Rancho TiJuana, located on both sides of the International Boundary line, was granted to Santiago Arguello in 1829. An adobe house was located on the rancho about eight miles up the TiJuana River from the present city of Tijuana. One of the Bandini's, a relative of Arguello, was living in the house at the time of Henderson's visit. The Punta, or Point, Rancho was part of the Arguello ranch that lay north of the Mexican border. That part of the ranch was located at the south end of San Diego Bay. Captain Gregory's house was located in present day National City.)

Sun. 24th. Travelled in Captain C. K. Porter's spring wagon 8 miles into San Diego.

(Thus ends the Lower California Diary.)

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LORE OF MADERA

The Junior Class of Madera High, under the guidance of their instructor, Mrs. Emily Wogaman, has produced three books about people and history of Madera County, but their third book LORE OF MADERA is outstanding. It is hard to describe in words that the reader may really visualize but it is no exaggeration to state that it is beautiful. It is filled with stories and pictures that those interested will really appreciate and enjoy.

The Sierra Star Press produced the book and as usual they have done a beautiful job.

The students have a thousand copies for sale at $2.50 per copy. Letters of inquiry relative to the book may be addressed to the Madera County Historical Society, Box 478, Madera, California.

MADERA COUNTY YOUNG HISTORIANS

The students of the Junior Class at Madera Union High School have shown a real interest in the history of Madera County the last three years.

This interest has come about through the inspired leadership of Mrs. Emily Wogaman, instructor in the English Department. As a result of this interest, the Junior Class has organized the Young Historians. Any student at Madera High may become a member or from any other high school in Madera County.

They have a constitution and have elected the following officers: President, Michael Pistoresi; Vice President, Carol Kraus; Secretary, Donna Hollingsworth; Treasurer, Richard Perkins. There are about thirty members and they are urging more high school students to become members.

"Dr. Max Rafferty, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, addressed a letter to 1400 school districts of California requesting them to cooperate in the efforts of the California Conference of Historical Societies in the Young Historian movement.

There are a few Young Historian groups over the state and Madera County is very proud that we are one of the few. The State Conference hopes to organize a statewide Young Historian's Conference with its own journal and a suitable awards program. The Young Historian program is a fine monument to the memory of the California Conference's State President Emeritus, Rockwell Dennis Hunt."

The above is quoted from President Walter Frome's message in the May 1966 California Historian.

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THE HISTORIAN

Two more issues of the Historian are yet to be printed in 1966. This bulletin is our instrument of communication with our members and the general public.

Do let us know if there are stories of people or incidents related to Madera County history that you feel would be interesting and worthy of being published in the Historian.

Extra copies are available of all of the Historians, including the first publication, if you are ever interested in completing your files.

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HOW ABOUT IT?

Are you receiving your Historian regularly? You should be unless you have forgotten to pay your dues. Have you?

Are you getting notices of all the quarterly meetings? Don't hesitate to notify our secretary, Harry A. Vollborn, Box 478, Madera, California. Make your desires and wishes known.

Articles continue to be donated to the Society and space is at a premium but we are managing the best we can. We could use more help on Monday afternoons from 2 to 5 P. M.

Guy Crow is supplying our new room with shelving. He has spent hours doing this so that we now have a little more room and can reorganize to some extent.

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THE MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN

Managing Editors - Madera County Historical Society Board of Directors:

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